

- 8–10 May BSR XIIIth AGM, Brighton
Contact: British Society for Rheumatology, Anne Mansfield, Deputy Executive Secretary, 3 St Andrew's Place, London NW1 4LB. Tel: 071 224 3739. Fax: 071 224 0156
- 15–18 May 1st Central European Congress of Rheumatology, Piešťany, Slovak Republic.
Contact: 1st Central European Congress of Rheumatology, Congress Secretariat, Research Institute of Rheumatic Diseases, Nábřežie Ivana Krasku 4, SK-921 01 Piešťany, Slovak Republic. Fax: +42 838 21192.
- 18–23 May 1996 World Congress on Osteoporosis, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Contact: Congrex Holland bv, Keizersgracht 782, 1017 EC Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Tel: +31 20 6261372. Fax: +31 20 6259574.
- 31 May–3 June 26th Scandinavian Congress of Rheumatology, Reykjavik, Iceland
Deadline for abstracts: 1 February 1996
Contact: Scientific Secretariat, Department of Internal Medicine, Division of Rheumatology, Landspítalinn, 101 Reykjavik, Iceland. Tel: 354 1 601255/5 601255. Fax: 354 1 601287/5 601287.
- 19–20 Sep Heberden Round, Dr M Seifert, Imperial College, London
Contact: British Society for Rheumatology, Anne Mansfield, Deputy Executive Secretary, 3 St Andrew's Place, Regents Park, London NW1 4LB. Tel: 071 224 3739. Fax: 071 224 0156
- 7–9 Oct IXth EULAR Symposium, Madrid
Contact: EULAR Secretariat, Witikonstrasse 15, CH-8032 Zurich, Switzerland. Tel: 41 1 383 96 90. Fax: 41 1 383 98 10
- 10–11 Oct 7th International Conference on Behçet's Disease, Tunis
Contact: Dr M Hamza, Professor of Rheumatology, BP 45, El Menzah, 1014 Tunisia
- 18–22 Oct American College of Rheumatology 60th AGM, Orlando
Contact: American College of Rheumatology, Ron F Olejko, Director, Conferences and Meetings, 60 Executive Park South, NE, Suite 150, Atlanta, Georgia 30329, USA. Tel: 404 633 3777. Fax: 404 633 1870

Book review

Assessment of fracture risk and its application to screening for postmenopausal osteoporosis (WHO Technical Report Series No 843). WHO Study Group. (Pp 129; Sw fr 22 (Developing Countries: Sw fr 15.40).) Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1994. ISBN 92-4-1208430.

The importance of osteoporosis as a health problem in elderly populations is now widely recognised. By the time that fractures are present, bone loss is usually advanced and irreversible changes in bone architecture have occurred; treatment of the established condition is therefore of limited efficacy and prophylaxis provides the optimal strategy. Although a number of agents which reduce or prevent bone loss have been identified, the selection of patients for treatment remains an unresolved and controversial issue. In particular, the question of screening for low bone mass has received much attention and is specifically addressed by this

report, which sets out to define the value and practical application of such an approach in postmenopausal women. The magnitude of the health problem caused by osteoporosis, the use of bone densitometry as a diagnostic and predictive test, risks and benefits of several interventions, and logistic and financial issues relevant to the screening programme itself are all discussed in detail. The report is well structured and, although there is no index, a detailed breakdown of the sections in each chapter is provided in the listed Contents, so that information on a specific topic can easily be found. With more than 30 tables and 20 figures the book presents an attractive format to the reader and the 466 references provide plenty of scope for additional reading.

Despite its modest size, this book is a mine of information and covers a broad spectrum of topics related to clinical aspects of osteoporosis. The assessment of bone mass is described in considerable detail, with evaluation of both old and new techniques and a detailed discussion of issues related to accuracy and precision. Densitometric and biochemical approaches to the assessment of bone loss are described; the conclusion on the latter approach is cautious, stressing the need for further research in this area. The risks and benefits of intervention are discussed with reference not only to hormone replacement therapy, but also to other agents such as bisphosphonates, calcitonins, calcium, and vitamin D. A diagnostic classification of osteopenia and osteoporosis is proposed, based on comparison of bone density values with young adult reference data; despite its inevitable limitations, most of which are acknowledged by the authors, this provides a more rational and standardised approach to diagnosis than previously available and should facilitate decisions about treatment in clinical practice.

The central question addressed by this report is so contentious that the temptation to turn immediately to the Summary and Conclusions section at the end is hard to resist. The statement that 'selected screening is worthwhile for women within 5 years of the menopause to stratify risk and offer intervention', would be interpreted by most as an endorsement of screening and appears at odds with the earlier conclusion in this section that 'the argument for treating or screening all women is poor', although this presumably refers to women of all ages. The authors also suggest, even more controversially, that there is a good case for screening women around the age of 65 years, based on the increasing evidence that significant bone loss is still occurring at this age and that intervention can reduce hip fracture risk and is cost effective. This should certainly stimulate vigorous discussion, although some might wish to delay judgment until further information becomes available.

The Study Group is represented by distinguished clinical scientists from a number of disciplines and this is reflected in excellent and concise coverage of a rapidly evolving subject. Inevitably, a few errors have crept in; for example hyperparathyroidism is not mentioned as a cause of secondary osteoporosis (table 5), whereas porphyria is. The time course of age related bone loss illustrated in figure 1 suggests that accelerated bone loss in women occurs during the seventh rather than the sixth decade and the term T score rather than Z score should be used on the graph and in the legend. Overall however, the report provides a valuable and accurate source of reference for the growing number of health professionals with an interest in osteoporosis and offers useful guidelines for the clinical management of this common disease. The debate about screening for osteoporosis will continue for some years to come; this book does not supply a definitive answer, but provides a framework for future discussions and strategies.

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